# After Gaddafi

Tuesday 6 September 2011, by ACHCAR Gilbert, WEARING David (Date first published: 4 September 2011).

**As was the case with his earlier articles for ZNet on the situation in Libya, our recent interview with Professor Gilbert Achcar [1] of SOAS elicited a good deal of responses, both in the comments under the article and from commentators elsewhere. Here, NLP's David Wearing asks Achcar a series of follow-up questions on the criticisms of his position, and on the emerging situation in Libya.**

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**David Wearing – Your position as I understand it is that, while NATO's attempt to hijack the Libyan revolution for its own ends should be opposed, that opposition ought not to have been applied to the initial stage of the military action, which probably saved Benghazi from serious atrocities at the hands of pro-Gaddafi forces. After that, however, arming the rebels should have been preferred to continued NATO action in pursuit of regime change (which must be opposed on anti-imperialist grounds). Firstly, is that an accurate representation of your position, and if not, would you please clarify for us? Secondly, is it realistic to support, or not oppose, a limited NATO action that would have protected Benghazi, but to oppose further NATO involvement, given the high probability that the latter would proceed from the former? Wasn't it always very unlikely in practice that NATO action would have stopped at Benghazi?**

Gilbert Achcar – These are two questions in one, and I will answer them one at a time. Allow me, however, to start with a comment on the debate provoked by my position within radical left circles in Europe and the Americas. (I am specifying the area because there was nothing remotely comparable in the Arab-speaking world to which I belong, although my position got as much exposure in Arabic as in European languages, if not more.)

As many thoughtful people on the radical left emphasised, the Libyan issue was, and remains, a complicated one confronting anti-imperialists with an unprecedented situation as NATO claimed to intervene on behalf of a real democratic popular uprising. For those whose anti-imperialism is accompanied by a fascination for caudillos, the issue was settled from the start: Gaddafi is a "great revolutionary leader" and the Libyan insurgents are nothing but the equivalent of the Nicaraguan contras. Under such conditions, it is extremely difficult to hold any fruitful debate. For the anti-Stalinist left, however, one would have expected – or wished – a debate of a level of sophistication that matches the complexity of the issue. With rare exceptions, alas, that was far from the case.

To be sure, the position I expressed was itself an unusually complex one, reflecting the intricacy of the situation. But this can't be a sufficient explanation, let alone an excuse, for the fact that my critics were on the whole unable to represent my position accurately, whether it was deliberate misrepresentation – for those who mistake caricature for argument – or as a result of misreading under the influence of the former. Thus, I had a first-hand experience of what Francis Bacon meant with his famous saying: "Slander boldly, something always sticks". Even though I never ever "supported" NATO's intervention, several detractors immediately distorted my position into one of

“support to NATO’s no-fly zone”, which translated naturally into “support to NATO intervention”, nay, “support to imperialism” for the most overexcited, without ever producing a single relevant quote. And despite my continuous refutation of this caricature in subsequent statements on the matter, my recent NLP interview being only the latest, some people on the left keep “summing up” my position to this day as one of “support for NATO’s intervention”.

Now, my personal experience is secondary. Such assaults do not impress me at all, otherwise I would never have expressed my position publicly. In over forty years of political struggle on the left, I have had to face slanders on several occasions, and was never intimidated. If you don’t have the courage to uphold what you believe is right, you’d better drop out of revolutionary politics. Everything I bore is small beer and petty flak compared to what anti-Stalinists had to endure in the heyday of Stalinism. This said, if I did uphold the position that I expressed, it is first of all because I believed it was right, naturally, and my belief was only strengthened by the developments since then. But I also upheld it for the sake of advancing the political debate on the radical left, beyond knee-jerk positions in black and white. I feel it my duty as ever, like everyone who has been involved in the radical left under conditions similar to mine, to contribute to the left’s elaboration of the most effective position in the struggle against imperialism and capitalism.

Unfortunately, some people on the radical left are unable to engage in a comradely debate without invective. They perpetuate a detestable tradition rooted in a style of polemics that Lenin’s cult did much to expand, and that Stalinism pushed to extremes. Fortunately, the Libyan discussion also confirmed to me that there are important sections of the radical left, whether whole currents or individuals, that are not only true radical democrats, but also people who share my conception of the left: a left for which human emancipation from oppression is the highest value, while all the rest, including anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism and socialism, are but derivatives of this primordial principle.

With apologies for that preamble, allow me to respond to your two questions:

First, the summary of my position that you offered – “while NATO’s attempt to hijack the Libyan revolution for its own ends ought to be opposed, that opposition ought not to have been applied to the initial stage of the military action” – is actually inaccurate. It is for me unquestionable that “NATO’s attempt to hijack the Libyan revolution for its own ends” ought to be opposed from start to end. What I said was simply – if I may use this term in describing a position that seems so hard to understand – that, whereas there should have been no illusion whatsoever about the real purpose of NATO, the initial stage of its military action in Libya, i.e. the destruction of Gaddafi’s forces concentrated on the outskirts of Benghazi and the destruction of his air force and major missile batteries, should not have been opposed, but only monitored with vigilance in order to denounce any NATO actions exceeding these goals.

Now let me clarify this issue of “non-opposition”. It is bewildering for me to see how much it is difficult for so many people to distinguish between “support” and “non-opposition”, even though they supposedly understand the difference between “voting in favour” and “abstaining”. For the sake of maximum clarity, I will translate the difference in organised actions, as didactically as possible. Supporting NATO’s initial enforcement of the no-fly zone leads to demonstrating in its favour. Opposing it leads to demonstrating against it. Not opposing it in the initial stage means abstaining from demonstrating against it, or calling for it to stop, during its first days, while warning against its continuation in order to prepare for the next stage when opposing it, i.e. demonstrating against it, becomes possible and necessary.

The rationale here is that in opposing the no-fly zone from day one, you are rejecting a request made by the insurgents themselves, and you hence behave as if you regard the fate of Benghazi’s

population as totally secondary to your sacrosanct anti-imperialism. What should have been done instead, as the major Arab anti-imperialist forces more or less did, was to tell the Libyan insurgents: “We regret very much that you were compelled to call for UN, i.e. Western help, but we understand that you were left with no alternative to this action of last resort due to the murderous brutality of Gaddafi’s regime, which bears full responsibility. We warn you nevertheless against any illusion about NATO’s intent to hijack your revolution. As soon as the threat against Benghazi will be removed and Gaddafi’s air force crippled, we will campaign for NATO to stop its direct involvement and to provide you instead with the weapons that you need, for we believe that you should liberate your own country by your own fight alone.”

As I said in my very first interview [2] speaking about the UN Security Council deliberation on the resolution that authorised the no-fly zone: “One can understand the abstentions; some of the five states who abstained in the UNSC vote wanted to express their defiance and/or unhappiness with the lack of adequate oversight, but without taking the responsibility for an impending massacre”. Indeed, China had much more interests in Libya than it had in Serbia, and yet, along with Russia, it threatened to veto the 1999 Kosovo war, which NATO then waged in violation of international law. These two states threatened again to veto the 2003 invasion of Iraq (a country where they did have important vested interests), obliging the US-UK coalition to violate international law even more flagrantly. So why didn’t they veto the no-fly zone resolution about Libya? It seems clear to me that it was because they didn’t want to take the blame internationally for what was very likely to be a massacre on a large scale, perpetrated by a demented despot. They abstained therefore, but never ceased denouncing NATO’s campaign for its violation of the very same resolution that they had refrained from vetoing.

Now, once the initial stage was over, i.e. once the danger threatening Benghazi had been removed and Gaddafi’s air force had been destroyed, it became both possible and necessary to oppose the continuation of the bombing, which was clearly going beyond its initial official mission of protection – provided you link that demand with that of arming the insurgents. Had the left acted in this way, I believe that its impact on public opinion would have been significantly more effective than what it has actually been, with the weakest and most unpopular antiwar campaign of recent decades.

Secondly, you ask whether it was “realistic to support, or not oppose, a limited NATO action that would have protected Benghazi, but to oppose further NATO involvement, given the high probability that the latter would proceed from the former”. The answer is simple here again, and involves one more time the same distinction that seems to be so hard to fathom.

It was definitely impossible to “support” a limited NATO action with the illusion that it would remain limited. It would have been extremely naïve to behave on the basis of such an assumption. It might have been less incongruous to support a UN action short of NATO’s involvement, but such a position would have been purely theoretical. It was clear to me – like to most people who knew their real purposes – that NATO powers, once involved, would not limit their action to “protecting civilians”, especially given that the UN resolution had been written in such a form as to give them maximum leeway. However, for the reasons I have repeatedly explained, it was not only realistic, but necessary to delay our opposition to the NATO powers’ intervention until the initial, objectively positive, outcome was achieved, that is the outcome that was objectively in the interest of the population of Benghazi and the Libyan insurrection as a whole. This outcome was, of course, rescuing Benghazi and allowing it to continue its role as the epicentre of Libya’s democratic revolution, thus preserving the latter from suppression.

Due to the antiwar movement’s present weakness, this is no more than a matter of political pedagogy and effectiveness in countering imperialism. The antiwar movement can thrive indeed only if it acts from a stance of clear moral superiority, as was the case at the time of the Vietnam War.

But imagine for one second that the antiwar movement had enough leverage to stop NATO powers' intervention. Why would we have prevented Benghazi from being rescued, thus allowing the Libyan revolution to be crushed, instead of letting the rescue take place and only then stopping the intervention? It doesn't make sense in the least.

**In respect of your expectations about what would have happened to Benghazi if retaken by Gaddafi's forces, the author Richard Seymour has argued [3], citing figures from Human Rights Watch [4] and elsewhere [5], that no large-scale massacre of the kind you invoked took place in Misrata when regime forces had the opportunity to carry one out, so we cannot say for certain that one would have taken place in Benghazi. How do you respond to that argument?**

This strikes me as an extremely weak and flawed argument. Before discussing its basic line, a brief comment is needed on the presentation of the facts. The first question that occurs to the mind of a serious researcher reading this argument is why does it refer to an insignificant news item about HRW's report instead of the easily available original? I invite you to read the latter in full – it is not long – and you will understand [6]: it demolishes completely – on both quantitative and qualitative levels – the benign picture of the regime forces' behaviour in Misrata that the author you mentioned tried to give.

Let me now discuss the logic of the argument. Unless one has been involved in a civil war and has a clear idea of what it means to be in a city under siege, one ought to be more modest and circumspect in discussing such issues (especially when one has been proved so wrong already in assessing the Libyan situation [7]). First of all, Misrata was simply never "retaken" by Gaddafi's forces: the rebels always controlled a major part of the city. At the peak of their offensive on Misrata, regime forces did not manage to recover control over more than some 40% of the city, let alone the fact that they remained permanently engaged in highly intensive fighting.

Anyone who's lived through a civil war, like the one in my country Lebanon, can tell you that civilians move a lot during wars: they flee from endangered areas to safer areas, or more accurately they flee from areas which they believe to be in danger to areas which they believe to be safe, and that can be in opposite directions when you have civilians belonging to clashing ethnic or political identities. In situations like the one in Misrata where you had very close fighting – house-by-house and street-by-street (to quote Gaddafi's famous dreadful speech) – the front line gets emptied of civilians as it moves along [8]. The buildings on the front line in Beirut and its suburbs were always empty of civilians who had taken refuge in safer areas. Besides, massacres of civilians are usually conducted cold-bloodedly, once the perpetrators are in control of the situation and they can afford to go after the civilians, searching homes and killing whoever they suspect to belong to the enemy camp; they are rarely perpetrated under fire and in the midst of intensive fighting.

Now, it is obvious that all those civilians in Misrata who had taken part in the uprising would not have remained in the areas taken by the dreaded Khamis (Gaddafi's son) brigade, but would have fled to rebel-held areas, all the more that the latter included the harbour from where they could have been evacuated, had Gaddafi's troops managed to push further their drive to recapture the city. Moreover, it is precisely the fear that regime forces would perpetrate a massacre if they were able to get hold of the whole city that inspired the rebellion there to resist so steadfastly against forces with overwhelming firepower, showering civilian areas with cluster bombs [9] and Grad rockets [10] from the early stage. A report in *The Guardian* on 24 March [11] related the rebels' belief that civilian casualties as a result of their resistance, were "a necessary price to prevent even greater loss of life if Gaddafi's forces had continued their assault on Misrata and exacted revenge against the residents for their support of the uprising".

Last but not least on the argument's basic line: it doesn't make sense to abstract NATO's action from the picture in assessing what Gaddafi's forces managed to do – or, worse still, what they would have done had NATO not intervened. No one can deny that NATO's intervention, even after its very initial stage (and therefore when I myself was arguing against its continuation), did take care of protecting civilian populations – its purported mission – especially in rebel-held areas. It did not only perform actions that exceeded this purported mission. NATO's air and firepower support provided the insurgent areas in Misrata with enough cover for them to be able to resist, and then launch a counter-offensive that was eventually victorious.

I will go even further than that. My main reference when it comes to what might have happened in Benghazi is what Syria's Assad regime did in the city of Hama in 1982, killing 25,000 people (an average estimate) in a city with one third of Benghazi's population. It took regime forces one week to recapture the city, a stronghold of Islamic anti-Assad opposition, after which they went on a killing spree for two weeks, searching the city house by house. Now look at what is happening today in Syria: a much bigger and larger uprising has been going on since mid-March. The city of Hama is again the stronghold of the uprising, the scene of spectacular demonstrations against the regime. For several days, it did even become a free city, abandoned by regime forces and run by grass-root committees. Regime troops eventually moved back into Hama.

Yet, the organisers of the uprising in Syria estimate the overall number of those killed since mid-March at close to 2,500 until this day – not in Hama alone but in the whole of Syria. There are two possible explanations for this: either you believe with Hugo Chávez that Bashar al-Assad is a "socialist and a humanist", or you recognize that NATO's intervention under UN cover in Libya acted as a powerful deterrent on Assad, leading him to restrain the use of his army's firepower and the murder spree of his thugs and mukhabarat (intelligence services). There is no doubt in my mind that the Western intervention in Libya accounts for the relative – with emphasis on relative – restraint of the Syrian regime's murderous behaviour until now.

The foreign intervention against Gaddafi's regime strengthened the morale of the Syrian protesters who entered into action at precisely the same time when the UN deliberated on Libya, in the belief that the 1982 massacre would not be repeated under the new circumstances. Consequently, the triumph of the Libyan rebellion in liberating Tripoli boosted considerably the morale of the Syrian insurgents, who hailed it in mass demonstrations, as did the Yemeni insurgents. In addition to those I have already set out, this was, from the start, another major consideration underlying my position on Libya. Had Gaddafi been left to crush Benghazi, the whole momentum of the "Arab Spring" as it is called would have been choked off. The Libyan rebellion's victory increased that momentum significantly, despite the fact that it is certainly tarnished by NATO's attempt at hijacking it.

**In our previous interview, you said that "the range of estimates of the number of people who were killed in Libya in the first month alone, before the Western intervention, starts at more than [2,000] and reaches 10,000". Seymour has described this as unreliable, pointing to a HRW total of 233 for the first week [12], and a later estimate from the UN Secretary General of about 1,000 [13]. Does this affect your assessment of the situation in Libya at the point where NATO intervened?**

Here again the way facts and figures are produced is extremely flawed. You quoted me correctly: I described "the range of estimates of the number of people who were killed in Libya in the first month alone", i.e. between 17 February and 17 March, as starting at over 2,000. How could the figures you mentioned be given to dispute the reliability of the minimal estimate within the range that I have mentioned? The first figure is – again – an indirect reference to a HRW estimate. The original estimate [14] of the human rights organisation is dated *20 February*. It says that in only four days the Libyan regime forces killed *at least* 233 persons! At this killing rhythm, the death toll would

reach 1,750 in one month, which is close to the 2,000 figure. However, HRW's estimate was a very conservative one, explicitly presented as such by the organisation itself. It is clear, moreover, that with the subsequent extension and intensification of the uprising and with the regime turning its full military means against the people, the repression became yet more murderous. As for the 1st of March figure given by the UN Secretary General – another indirect quote – it was referring to his statement pronounced on *25 February* [15], i.e. nine days after the start of the uprising, when he told the Security Council that "estimates indicate that more than 1,000 people have been killed". At this killing rhythm, which itself was based on a conservative estimate ("more than"), the death toll would have exceeded 3,330 in one month, so we are already 50% above the most conservative estimate that I mentioned and that the author you quote disputed.

Now, it is clear that in a situation like the one that prevailed in Libya, it is impossible, for reasons obvious to all, to get an accurate figure of the death toll [16]. This is why I always mentioned a range of estimates, from the most conservative given by very cautious sources to the highest figure in circulation, the 10,000 figure, which – although it was most probably a wild exaggeration when it was first given by a member of the International Criminal Court one week after the beginning of the repression – was still being quoted in mid-March. But recall the reason for my mentioning the range of estimates: it was to show that, by even the most conservative estimate, you had at least as many deaths in one month in Libya as you had in five and a half months (at the time of the interview) in Syria, the next bloodiest repression after Libya of all uprisings in the region. The Syrian figure of 2,200 was the one given by the Syrian opposition at the time of the interview.

As for the Libyan opposition, its spokesman declared on 20 March that "our dead and martyrs number more than 8,000 killed" [17]. Why would one accept the Syrian opposition's estimate and reject the Libyan opposition's estimate? This would show a flagrant double standard: you accept an estimate as long as you sympathise with those who give it, and suddenly reject it when it gets quoted by Western sources in justifying their governments' intervention. This said, the Syrian opposition's estimate is certainly conservative since it records mostly reported and identified deaths – a body count that is possible when the rate of daily killing is not too high to assess. It was much more difficult to make such a count in Libya, and that is why one must give a range instead of a single estimate.

Let me now discuss what is much more important than this petty and sordid quibbling about the number of the deaths. Let us consider the basic point that my critic tried to make. In my previous NLP interview to which he was reacting, I quoted the range of estimates in answering a question about "the likelihood that if Benghazi had fallen there would have been a massacre". My critic and others like him disputed this claim. They went therefore into a convoluted and rather macabre discussion of figures to explain that it was "not sure", or that "there are reasons to doubt" that a large-scale massacre would have happened in Benghazi, had Gaddafi's forces been able to subdue the city.

In doing so out of knee-jerk anti-imperialism, they ignored the crucial fact that the certainty that a massacre was impending was not one "invented" by NATO sources, but the strong belief of the population of the two besieged strongholds of the anti-Gaddafi insurrection, Benghazi and Misrata. The request by the Benghazi-based Transitional National Council (TNC) was made from the heart of the most endangered city, by people who had seen what the regime forces had done theretofore. Indeed, Benghazi was by that time full of refugees from other parts of Libya struck by the repression, who certainly understood the nature of that repression very well.

On top of their own experience of the situation, contrasting with the absolute inexperience of my critic, they were faced with a very explicit threat of massacre that I have summarized in a previous article on ZNet [18], which I will quote for you:

*"On 22 February … Muammar al-Gaddafi himself gave one of the most dreadful speeches in recent historical memory, a speech whose tone and vocabulary (in particular the description of his opponents as rodents and insects) were reminiscent of the 1930s (only a partial and approximate translation [19] of the speech is available in English). The Libyan despot evoked as precedents that he intended to imitate, among others, the 1989 massacre in Tiananmen and the 2004 one in Fallujah. He also evoked the 2008-9 Israeli onslaught on Gaza, an analogy that he reiterated on March 7 in an interview he gave to a French satellite channel [20], the day resolution 1973 was to be adopted by the Security Council, he compared his assault on Benghazi to that of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco's attack on Madrid, stating that he relied on the emergence of a 'fifth column' from among the city's population to help him 'liberate' it. The regime forces had then started concentrating on the outskirts of Benghazi in order to launch their offensive on the city, which began on March 19 [21]."*

And in spite of this you find someone in London, from the comfort of his desk, basically telling the people in Benghazi: "I am not sure that you will be massacred, guys! I have reasons to doubt it. Be courageous and take the risk. You have only your life to lose, I have my bet. I am willing to take the risk that you might be massacred. This risk is anyhow less important a consideration than my own reflexive opposition to whatever the government of my country does. Sorry if you can't understand." This is the kind of *attitude* that I described as indecent. And please note: I never ever spoke of a "decent left" as my critic – who seems to be as careless with words as he is with figures – attributed to me, thus associating me slanderously with people whose positions I loathe [22].

Now enough is enough: I wouldn't want to spend any more time engaging in the debate over what should have been done during the very first days of NATO's intervention in Libya.

**We see reports now of serious reprisals against pro-Gaddafi forces, and racist attacks on black Africans in Libya. How great is the danger of these serious abuses turning into full scale atrocities, and how can the European left best respond?**

There have indeed been many atrocities and human rights violations committed by Libyan rebels. Black people have been particularly targeted from the very early stage of the uprising. This is due to the fact that a significant proportion of Gaddafi's troops were composed of mercenaries recruited from poor African countries, like Chad, Sudan, Niger, and Mali. This old and well-known fact was compounded by the forced recruitment of African migrants [23] to fight with Gaddafi's troops when the uprising started, with such forced recruits often cruelly deployed on the front line. Google "mercenaries Libya", restricting your research to the past month, and you will find a lot of reports on Gaddafi's mercenaries, including interviews with many of them coming from various countries. So in a sense, and tragically, the targeting of Black people came as a "backlash" as *The Guardian* put it recently [24]. Of course, this is no excuse at all. It is important and necessary for the left to denounce vigorously these acts. But Western governments are as keen on stopping them as the left for fear of the potential embarrassment should their present boastful attitude turn sour. Most if not all Western media have run reports on the persecution of Blacks by Libyan rebels, and that's a good thing.

It would be very unfair, however, to blame the whole Libyan rebellion for such acts. From the very early stage of the uprising, the more organised and disciplined forces on the rebels' side took counter-measures [25]. Had atrocities, ethnic and colour profiling, and human rights violations been the result of instructions given by the central rebel leadership, or even a consequence of some hateful discourse emanating from its spokespersons, it would have deserved to be denounced and combated for that matter – no doubt about that. But the fact is that this leadership made repeated public statements condemning such acts, and calling for their immediate halt. In his first public statement after the liberation of Tripoli, TNC's chairman, Mustafa Abdul-Jalil even threatened to

resign if unlawful revenge acts and extrajudicial killings were committed by rebel forces. Both Human Rights Watch [26] and Amnesty International [27] praised the TNC's attitude, while urging it to take more measures.

It would be unfair likewise to take a negative stance towards the Libyan revolution because of atrocities committed in its course. The key point here is what defenders of the French Revolution stressed in its time: whatever atrocities were committed in the course of the revolution paled when compared with the atrocities that the Ancien Régime perpetrated over the long haul. Things are morally clearer actually in Libya: the amount of atrocities committed by the Gaddafi regime over decades, as well as during the last few months, many of which are now surfacing for the first time, dwarf whatever atrocities have been carried out by Libyan rebels, who have alas not been educated in the spirit of humanism and internationalism under 42 years of ruthless and demented dictatorship. All revolutions evolving into civil wars saw atrocities committed on both sides: there is hardly any exception to this sad rule. Unfortunately, peaceful revolutions are not similarly possible under all regimes.

**Going forward, what methods can we expect the Western powers to use to manipulate the current situation to their advantage, and how should anti-imperialists respond?**

The most important issue in this regard is the unbearably boastful attitude of the likes of Sarkozy and Cameron and the Obama administration. The truth is that the "success" of NATO's Libyan expedition is the exception that confirms the rule; it definitely does not constitute the rule, whatever "doctrine" they may want to build upon it.

There was indeed a popular uprising in Iraq hoping for foreign military protection in 1991: when the people got emboldened by their dictatorship's defeat in the war over Kuwait, they rose up in March 1991 in the North and the South of the country. What happened then is that Washington colluded with Saddam Hussein to let him crush the two uprisings for fear they might lead to an Iranian takeover. The wars of Kosovo and Iraq 2003 were waged in flagrant violation of international law. In both cases, there were peaceful alternatives at hand. Those two wars and occupations created ugly outcomes, condemning the countries in question to instability for the long haul. The war in Afghanistan was waged in conjunction with ethnic minority forces against the Taliban's hegemony over the largest ethnic minority. It only led to the reinforcement of this hegemony and, likewise, to protracted instability.

In Libya itself, even though NATO's intervention contributed, to be sure, to the rebels' victory, it was actually designed in such a way as to hijack the revolution, impose NATO's tutelage, and try to shape Libya's future government as I have explained at length in the article I wrote a few days before the liberation of Tripoli [28]. Every element of NATO's "conspiracy" against the Libyan revolution that I described in that article can now be verified on the ground. This is especially the case with the pressure from Western powers on the TNC to accommodate whole segments of Gaddafi's regime in the new state structure, with holier-than-thou calls to "forgiveness" and "reconciliation". There are even rumours about horse-trading behind the scenes for the integration of Gaddafi's son Saadi into the TNC [29] – a perspective that NATO powers certainly favour, but one that could hardly be implemented due to the huge uproar that it would create among the rebels. As it was indeed predictable, attempts at integrating men of the fallen regime in leading positions are already provoking opposition among the rebels, as reported recently in *The Guardian* [30]:

*"The second crack in the [rebel] coalition – the first was the still unresolved murder of its military commander in Benghazi, General Abdul Fattah Younis – emerged on Monday, when a protest erupted in Misrata's Martyr's Square over reports that the NTC was about to appoint Albarrani Shkal as head of security in Tripoli. Shkal, a key confidant of Gaddafi turned rebel informer, was*

*operations officer for the infamous Khamis Brigade that murderously bombarded residential areas of Misrata during the long siege there. Within hours Benghazi had reversed its decision, choosing Abdul Hakim Belhaj, a former commander of a jihadist organisation with historical links to al-Qaida and the Taliban, as the new head of Tripoli's military council."*

Belhaj, the new head of Tripoli's military council was contested in his turn, as reported in the *New York Times* [31]:

*"Several liberals among the rebel leadership council complained privately that Mr. Belhaj had been a leader of the disbanded Libyan Islamist Fighting Group, which rebelled against Colonel Qaddafi in the 1990s. Some said they feared it was the first step in an attempt at an Islamist takeover. They noted that Mr. Belhaj was named commander by the five battalions of the so-called Tripoli Brigade, rather than by any civilian authority. And they complained about the perceived influence of Qatar, which helped train and equip the Tripoli Brigade and also finances Al Jazeera.*

'This guy is just a creation of the Qataris and their money, and they are sponsoring the element of Muslim extremism here,' another council member from the western region said. "The revolutionary fighters are extremely unhappy and surprised. He is the commander of nothing!"

Mixed with the ideological concerns, however, was an equal measure of provincial rivalry over who did more to liberate Tripoli. Not only was Mr. Belhaj an Islamist, the council member argued, but he had done less than the western rebels in the fight for the capital.

'People in the west were saying to each other, What? This kid? This is rubbish! What about our top commanders?' the council member said."

As it happens, the Qatar-backed former jihadist, Abdul Hakim Belhaj, is the man who is dealing with Saadi Gaddafi [32], after having dealt with another of Gaddafi's sons, the formerly Western-favourite Seif al-Islam [33], who let him out of jail a year ago. All this is but a pre-taste of the dissensions to come in a post-Gaddafi Libyan situation that will certainly be no less conflict-ridden than post-Ben Ali Tunisia or post-Mubarak Egypt. In the meantime, we see this headline in the *Wall Street Journal*: "Rift Over Libyan Oil Emerges Among Allies" [34]. No further comment is needed.

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**P.S.**

* From New Left Project:
http://www.newleftproject.org/index.php/site/article_comments/after_gaddafi

* Gilbert Achcar is Professor of Development Studies and International Relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He is the author of several books, including "The Clash of Barbarisms: The Making of the New World Disorder"; "Perilous Power: The Middle East and U.S. Foreign Policy", co-authored with Noam Chomsky; and most recently "The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives".

David Wearing is a PhD student of political science at the School of Public Policy, University College London. His research topic is Britain's response to the Arab Spring. He is a co-editor of New Left Project.

## Footnotes

[1] See on ESSF (article 22697): Libya: Popular rebellion and imperialist designs.

[2] See on ESSF (article 20743): Libyan Developments.

[3] See on ESSF (article 22766): Libya: Gilbert Achcar and the decent left.

[4] http://articles.boston.com/2011-04-14/bostonglobe/29418371_1_rebel-stronghold-civilians-rebel-positions

[5] http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2011/05/15/misrata-rebels.html?ref=rss

[6] http://www.hrw.org/news/2011/04/10/libya-government-attacks-misrata-kill-civilians

[7] See on ESSF (article 22767): Gaddafi is stronger than ever in Libya.

[8] http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/features/2011/04/2011415175535792410.html

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